

August 31, 1994

Hon. Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of
Representatives
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Congresswoman Pelosi:

On behalf of Black Women Organized for Action, I want to express our very strong support for specific aspects of health care reform in our nation. We admired the President's courage in addressing this critical issue with creativity, rather than caving into pressure for piecemeal tinkering with a system that has long cried out for radical change. And we are deeply grateful to Hillary Clinton for her leadership and persistence in bringing the message of health care reform to the American public. We have lagged far behind most other industrial nations in securing this fundamental right for our residents.

First, we are fully committed to fight for universal coverage as the linchpin in overall reform; without it, we can neither make health care affordable, nor just. It is folly to assume that we can address reduction of health care costs without spreading costs over a wide base of coverage.

Second, we support the concept of employer responsibility for paying some or all the costs for a benefit package that covers both workers and dependents. However, it is important to provide support for fledgling (small) businesses, for whom the cost of such benefits would now be prohibitive, by appropriate subsidies and/or innovative "pooling" of small employers into consortia that can bring costs down. We would oppose a system that is **only** employer-based because of the uncertainty of our economic system which has put hundreds of thousands of people out of work and out of health coverage--many at a period of their lives when new health coverage is difficult to find at a reasonable cost. Young people, particularly those relegated to low-skill, low paid jobs in marginal industries are very much affected by the health care crisis. It is appalling to learn of the number of teenagers and young adults who have **never had access to a doctor**.

Third, we lean towards a single-payer system, crafted in this age of technology to eliminate as much bureaucracy as possible. But, we would support an interim approach that permits states to offer multiple options for a payment system so that we can test what would work best for the greatest number of people. The health field should not be dominated by people or companies whose main interest is in raking in high profits.

Fourth, the system should reward **preventive** efforts to keep Americans healthy, rather than emphasize reactive, expensive after-the-fact remedies.. But we want a system that does not punish the ill by denying coverage to those with "pre-existing" conditions. We would like to see more attention paid to early screening, and to research into causes and cures for life-threatening illnesses, including genetic illnesses such as sickle cell anemia. We want to see greater emphasis on health education, nutrition, exercise and remedies that are not limited to traditional "western medicine."

Fifth, we want a health care system that treats women with dignity and respect and fully covers uniquely female health issues - such as pre-natal care, breast cancer, **and** abortion and family planning.

While we recognize that there are many complex issues still to be addressed before we can become satisfied with health care delivery, we want to be on record in support of the most equitable system we can design which emphasizes **health care as a right** and establishes the joint responsibility of both the private and public sectors to make the "right" a reality.

Please keep us informed on the progress of the various bills under consideration in Congress. We would rather see health care reform postponed until the next session of Congress rather than settle for an inadequate bill that causes more problems than it cures.

Sincerely,

Aileen C. Hernández